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ABSTRACT

A process for isolating and purifying phytosterols and phytostanols from tall oil pitch is disclosed which provides for the formation of a modified pitch prior to the downstream processing steps. These modification steps include saponifying the distilled pitch with an aqueous solution of one or more alkali metal bases to form a saponified pitch and, neutralizing the saponified pitch with an amount of acid sufficient to achieve an ending pH of between 5.8 and 6.3 to form a neutralized pitch. A pre-saponification distillation step enhances the efficiency of the process.